

53
Thursday, Feb. 8, 1968
11:15 a. m.

MR. PRESIDENT:

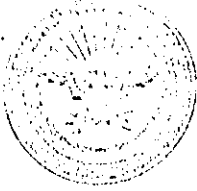
Bob Ginsburgh made available to me this staff memorandum of General DePuy's bearing on the question you raised with me this morning, and which I am discussing with Gen. Wheeler. You may wish to read it.

W. W. Rostow

~~TOP SECRET~~ attachment



53a



THE JOINT STAFF

THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL ASSISTANT FOR
COUNTERINSURGENCY AND SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

7 February 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

Through: Director, Joint Staff

Subject: "The Meaning of the Communist Offensive
in Vietnam"

1. There is much speculation concerning the purpose and the strategy behind the current enemy offensive in Vietnam. Captured documents, prisoner statements and Hanoi announcements seem to speak rather clearly on this point.

2. The enemy says that he wants a coalition government and an end to the war. He wants the coalition government to be under the leadership of the NLF.

3. The enemy has said that the Thieu/Ky clique have never been, and can never be, a government. Therefore, the coalition he has in mind is obviously not between the NLF and the GVN. He seems to visualize a coalition between the NLF and other "patriotic" elements in South Vietnam. He no doubt has in mind the militant Buddhists, the students, the intellectuals and so much of the population as he may be able to scrape together under the so-called Alliance of National and Peace Forces Committees.

4. His main problem is that the GVN and its Army stand in his way and are not only unacceptable to him but are also implacable and irreconcilable enemies.

5. Thus, if he is to end the war by establishing a coalition which then sues for peace and for American withdrawal he must destroy the GVN. In order to destroy the GVN he must either achieve a popular uprising against it or wear it down quickly, particularly its army, until it has lost confidence in itself, and the people in it.

DECLASSIFIED

Authority MLG/CBS 6
By WJ/y, NARA, Date 2-5-92

TOP SECRET
TOP SECRET

1. DATE	2. TIME
3. BY	4. FOR
5. BY	6. FOR



6. He has sent his VC main, local and guerrilla forces against the structure of the government at every level simultaneously. He has told his combat units to persevere in their attacks and they may or may not be able to do so. In the meanwhile, he has held off his North Vietnamese forces with minor exceptions (20 percent) to keep U.S. forces dispersed or engaged. He must believe that his VC forces with some NVA gap fillers have the capability of grinding down the RVNAF and destroying the governmental mechanism.

7. By the most optimistic estimate the VC have lost about 20,000 out of 140,000 armed men. Another 75,000 irregulars which recently were written out of the order of battle may be available to him as reserves and replacements.

8. If he is able to do exactly what he says he will do we can expect that this first phase of attacks will continue (perhaps with ups and downs in intensity) for as long as it takes to enervate the government and the RVNAF. Signs of enervation are now emerging in the I Corps area near Hue. If U.S. forces seem to be upsetting these plans in a decisive way he can intensify his squeeze at Khe Sanh and commit 9 North Vietnamese Divisions which are not now heavily committed and in some cases not committed at all.

9. Within the next few days and in order to draw off U.S. forces so that his attrition battle can go on against the government, we should expect to see increased NVA action at Gio Linh, Conthien, Khe Sanh, Dak To, Kontum, Danang, Tam Ky/Chu Lai/Quang Ngai (or all three), Tuy Hoa and Nha Trang and somewhere north of Saigon by the 7th NVA Division.

10. The critical areas to be watched continue to be:

- a. Effectiveness of the RVNAF.
- b. The state of provinces and districts and the autonomous cities - i.e. the QVN.
- c. Reaction of the people.

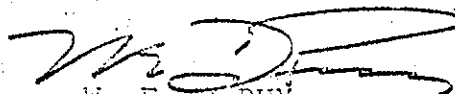
11. The enemy says February is the key month and a coalition would come about during TET. He talks of negotiations and the war being over in the first half of 1968 and about his soldiers being home by August.

12. He cannot make a climactic effort of this kind on a repeated basis. He cannot send units in to stay and die unless he has a timetable. It seems that he is pushing all his chips into the middle of the table. Ours are there also. It is not credible to think in terms of a peak of effort followed by subsidence and a return to the status quo ante. Vietnam will never be the same again.

13. General Westmoreland must:

- a. Hold off the NVA.
- b. Protect the GVN at most or all levels.
- c. Keep ARVN intact.

14. By March or April the issue will be decided. General Westmoreland could use some more troops.


W. E. DePUY
Major General, USA